

UTAH STATE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

FRANKLIN STEWART HARRIS, PRESIDENT

LOGAN, UTAH

SUMMER SCHOOL
M. R. MERRILL, DEAN

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President Heber Meeks
485 North Avenue, N.E.
Atlanta 5, Georgia

Dear Heber:

It is nice to have word of you after so many years. I am writing this, as you see, from our alma mater, where I am teaching the first term of the summer session. A thousand memories of student days flood in upon me every day. It is pleasant to see old friends and to make new ones among those who have joined the staff since I left.

Yes, I spent a year in the Caribbean from September 1945 to September 1946. Most of my time was spent in Cuba, but I managed to get to some of the other islands as well. I have nearly completed a book about Cuba, but it will be some time before it is published. I was pleased to have word of my friend Chester Young, whom I saw in Havana and also in Santo Domingo during my year down there.

The attitude of the Church in regard to the Negro makes me very sad. Your letter is the first intimation I have had that there was a fixed doctrine on this point. I had always known that certain statements had been made by authorities regarding the status of the Negro, but I had never assumed that they constituted an irrevocable doctrine. I hope no final word has been said on this matter. I must say that I have never been able to accept the idea, and never shall. I do not believe that God is a racist. But if the church has taken an irrevocable stand, I would dislike to see it enter Cuba or any other island where different races live and establish missionary work. The white and colored people get along much better in the Caribbean and most of Latin-America than they do in the United States. Prejudice exists, there is no doubt, and the whites in many ways manifest their feelings of superiority, but there is much less of it than one finds in USA, especially in our South. For us to go into a situation like that and preach a doctrine of "white supremacy" would, it seems to me, be a tragic disservice. I am speaking frankly, because I feel very keenly on this question. If world brotherhood and the universal God idea mean anything, it seems to me they mean equality of races. I fail to see how Mormonism or any other religion claiming to be more than a provincial church can take any other point of view; and there cannot be world peace until the pernicious doctrine of the superiority of one race and the inferiority of others is rooted out. This is my belief.

In reference to Catholicism, while the Cubans are nominally Roman Catholic, they take the religion rather lightly. Wherever I went, I asked rural people about the church and invariably they told me that they saw the priest only once a year, when he came around to baptize the babies at \$3.00 per head; like branding the calves at the

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annual roundup. Some families have crucifixes and other paraphernalia in their homes and carry on something of the ancient ritual, but my impression is that it means little to most of them.]

The Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists have, as you know, done a great deal of missionary work in the Island, and have rendered Cuba a great service in maintaining schools, hospitals, etc.; however, they have limited their work largely to the urban centers. [There is a great service to be rendered rural Cubans if the right approach were made. Mormonism is well adapted to render such service with its system of lay leadership and many activity programs. Many rural Cubans have nothing in the way of organized social life. To them, the family is the basic institution and beyond it, the neighborhood. Our Church would provide them with something very sorely needed. It would develop leadership among them, provide them with hope and aspiration, give them a feeling of importance as individuals which they have never had. They have been exploited by priest and politician; they have been led to believe that the government is not any of their responsibility and that the Church is the business of the priest and the bishop. While there is a great deal of individualism among them, they have definite and discernible feelings of inferiority when it comes to matters of leadership.] #✓

I am talking about the white people now; the rural people are predominantly white. That is, they are as white as mediterranean peoples are - Spanish, Italians, etc. - who have been in contact with "color" for centuries. The Moors occupied Spain, you know, for seven centuries. There are no pure races; on this anthropologists are in general agreement. Of course, this does not mean that Negro blood exists throughout the white race or vice versa. There is grave doubt, however, as to the purity of the Nordic, Mediterranean, or even the Negro. Because I think our system of religious organization could serve the rural Cuban people as perhaps no other system could, I am sad to have to write you and say, for what my opinion is worth, that it would be better for the Cubans if we did not enter their island - unless we are willing to revise our racial theory. To teach them the pernicious doctrine of segregation and inequalities among races where it does not exist, or to lend religious sanction to it where it has raised its ugly head would, it seems to me, be tragic. It seems to me we just fought a war over such ideas.

I repeat, my frankness or bluntness, as you will, is born of a fervent desire to see the causes of war rooted out of the hearts of men. What limited study I have been able to give the subject leads me to the conclusion that ethnocentrism, and the smugness and intolerance which accompany it, is one of the first evils to be attacked if we are to achieve the goal of peace.

I trust you will understand my writing you as I have.

Sincerely,

Lowry
Lowry Nelson

LN:gj

cc: Pres. George Albert Smith